



CATHOLIC EDUCATION OFFICE
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Teaching and Learning About Scripture

Occupations



- Shepherding
- Tax Collecting

[Shepherding](#)

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Shepherding



Shepherding is the oldest occupation mentioned in the Bible.

- Sheep were very useful. Their wool could be collected and woven into cloth, their milk drunk or made into cheese and their meat eaten.



- Because sheep have both cloven hooves and chew their cud, they are among the animals that the Jews were (and are) allowed to eat.
- Perfect, unblemished, lambs were also used for sacrifice at the Passover ritual.



- Although most families kept a sheep or two, shepherding was mostly done in the south of Palestine, in the rocky, barren hills around Jerusalem. The shepherds' job was to care for the sheep, often in harsh and difficult circumstances.





- Shepherding was a hard life. The sole task was ensuring the sheep were safe and well: keeping them safe from wild animals and moving them to find food and water. This could be a very hard task on land that was often inhospitable!



- Finally, shepherds were not really liked by the people as they were often very poor (and smelly). Many shepherds did not mind their own sheep but instead looked after someone else's. Also, they often did not fulfil their religious duties as they were minding the sheep!

- As a result they were considered as 'sinners' by many.





Tax Collecting

A mosaic of the Jesus and Zacchaeus story in Jericho





- Tax collectors or agents collected 'tolls' or 'taxes' on behalf of the Romans. Taxes were used to fund the facilities provided to and for the people – much as our own tax system does now.
- However, while people often don't like paying tax, there were three reasons it was particularly disliked in the time of Jesus.





- Tax Collectors collected tax for the Romans, a people who had invaded and occupied the land. To the Israelites, paying tax to the people who had taken their land was particularly insulting.
- This was especially so as some of the tax the Israelites paid was used to pay the Roman army to keep the people under control! It was like paying the prison guard to keep you in prison! Some people thought that not paying taxes to the Romans was a good way of showing that they were not welcome in Palestine and should leave!



— Also, the job of a Tax Collector was one that you bought. The Romans sold the licence to be a tax collector. When a Jewish person, such as Zacchaeus, bought the licence he effectively asked to be able to take money from his own people. That was very offensive to other members of Jewish society.





– Finally, because they dealt with money, Tax Collectors were in a perfect position to steal from the people. Some charged more than they were entitled to and then kept a little for themselves. As a result Tax Collectors had a bad reputation: they were considered dishonest and untrustworthy.





- Chief Tax Collector

- The Bible tells us that Zacchaeus was the Chief Tax Collector. This means he was responsible for supervising other Tax Collectors. Zacchaeus was therefore very involved in the whole process: being the Boss of the 'disliked', he was 'doubly disliked'.
- This may have been because Zacchaeus could defraud the people in ways that other simple tax collectors could not.



- Chief Tax Collector

- Because they were very wealthy, one of the practises some Chief Tax Collectors did was buy up crops (grains) when they were first harvested and abundant. They would then store them and sell them back to the people at a huge profit when they were in short supply.
- For Jesus to attend the house of a tax collector was for him to associate with someone who was thought to be, by their own actions, working against the community in ways which were despised.





Internet Sites

- <http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Zacchaeus>

This site has some basic information about tax collectors with related sites

- http://www.ccel.org/ccel/smith_w/bibledict.html?term=Publican

This is a link to a Bible dictionary that provides another name for a tax collector... a publican. This site explores the kind of work Zacchaeus would have undertaken and explains more fully why he was despised and why he was the lowest of the low in Jewish eyes. No wonder Jesus shocked and surprised people by associating with Zacchaeus.



A View of Jericho Today





A View of Jericho Today





A Sycamore Tree in Jericho

